Grieg Lyric Pieces
Mendelssohn Lieder ohne Worte
Denis Kozhukhin

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1809-1847)

Lieder ohne Worte, Op. 19

1	no. 1: Andante con moto in E Major	2. 58
2	no. 2: Andante espressivo in A Minor	2. 38
3	no. 3: Molto allegro e vivace in A Major	2. 33
4	no. 5: Piano agitato in F-sharp Minor	3. 33

Lieder ohne Worte, Op. 30

5	no. 2: Allegro di molto in B Minor	2. 13
6	no. 6: Allegretto tranquillo in F-sharp Minor (Venetianisches Gondellied)	2. 52

Lieder ohne Worte, Op. 38

7	no. 2: Allegro non troppo in C Minor	2. 13
8	no. 6: Andante con moto in A-flat Major (Duett)	3. 17

Lieder ohne Worte, Op. 62

9	no. 3: Andante maestoso in E Minor	2. 56

Lieder ohne Worte, Op. 67

10	no. 2: Allegro leggiero in F-sharp Minor	2. 38
11	no. 4: Presto in C Major	2. 00

Lieder ohne Worte, Op. 102

12	no. 3: Presto in C Major (Kinderstück)	1. 17

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

Lyric Pieces, Op. 12

13	no. 1: Arietta	1. 10
14	no. 2: Waltz	1. 40
15	no. 4: Elves' dance	0. 58

Lyric Pieces, Op. 38

16	no. 4: Dance	0. 58
17	no. 6: Elegy	2. 26

Lyric Pieces, Op. 43

18	no. 1: Butterfly	2. 04
19	no. 4: Little bird	1. 49
20	no. 6: To Spring	2. 45

Lyric Pieces, Op. 47

21	no. 7: Elegy	2. 57

Lyric Pieces, Op. 54

22	no. 3: March of the Trolls	3. 07
23	no. 4: Notturno	3. 02
24	no. 5: Scherzo	3. 10

Lyric Pieces, Op. 62

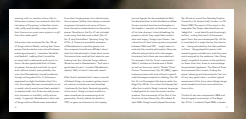
25	no. 4: Brooklet	1. 53

Lyric Pieces, Op. 65

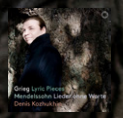
26	no. 6: Wedding Day at Troldhaugen	6. 09

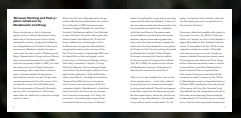
Total playing time: 65. 37

Denis Kozhukhin, piano



The infinite power and depth of romantic vibrations does not always require big shapes to express it. These miniature gems by two poets of music are a shining example of how disarmingly touching and penetrating a simple song or a vision of nature captured in sounds can be.





'Between Painting and Poetry': piano miniatures by Mendelssohn and Grieg

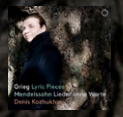
Piano miniatures or short character pieces, with or without descriptive titles, were one of the dominant forms of the nineteenth century, ranging from Beethoven's *Bagatelles* and Schubert's *Moments musicaux* to Brahms's valedictory piano music and the early works of Debussy and Ravel. Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words* were composed between the late 1820s and the composer's death in 1847, at much the same time as his friend Schumann was creating other small forms of piano music (*Fantasiestücke*, *Kinderszenen*, *Nachtstücke* and so on) and Chopin was reworking elements from the music of his homeland in more than fifty Mazurkas. For the composers of the early Romantic period, short compositions of this kind were often an ideal way to capture a single mood in music.

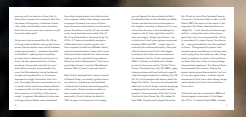
When the first set of Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words* was published by the London firm of Novello in 1832, the pieces were issued as *Original Melodies for the Pianoforte* but the German edition that followed a year later from Simrock in Bonn gave the title as *Lieder ohne Worte* Op. 19 and the French edition from Schlesinger in Paris as *Romances sans paroles*. Mendelssohn composed an early version of one of the Op. 19 set in London in September 1829 and his beautifully written autograph manuscript (now in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York) is headed, in English, 'A Song'. While the German title was always *Lieder ohne Worte*, the first English editions of the eight books referred to 'Original Melodies … Lieder ohne Worte' – the English translation 'Songs without Words' years only came into common use several years after the composer's death. Mendelssohn's intentions were clear from the start, as can be seen from the early manuscript of a 'Song' for solo piano: to produce piano pieces that mirrored the forms and styles of German

Lieder (including folk songs, duets, spinning songs and Venetian barcarolles). It was not only an ingenious idea but also proved to be an immensely successful one: in Germany, Britain and France, the pieces were an immediate commercial success: good amateur players were seeking genuinely new music that did not always require the technical virtuosity needed for many pieces by Chopin or Liszt (to say nothing of several by Mendelssohn himself). When Robert Schumann reviewed the Simrock edition of the second set of *Songs without Words* (Op. 30) in 1835, he mused on the nature of Mendelssohn's pieces, attempting to describe this new and unusual form:

'Who of us in the twilight hour has not sat at his upright piano … and in the midst of improvising has not unconsciously begun to sing a quiet melody? Should one happen to be able to *play* the cantilena along with the accompaniment, above all, should one happen to be a Mendelssohn, the loveliest 'song without words' would result. Or, still easier, to choose a text and then, eliminating the words, give one's compositions to the world in this form.'

Schumann detected parallels with poetry in this music. For him, Op. 30 No. 2 had parallels in its 'tender, airy form' with Goethe's *Jägers Abendlied* (a text Schubert had set twice). It is possible that Op. 30 No. 6 was originally created as a result of Mendelssohn having a poem in mind, though he always intended the work as a piano piece. The programmatic elements of the *Songs without Words* have always been a matter of speculation, and after Mendelssohn's death several of them acquired titles that were entirely unconnected with the composer himself. Concerning Op. 30 No. 6, Mendelssohn wrote to Henriette Voigt on 15 March 1835, sending her the manuscript of the piece with the title 'Gondola Song' (Gondellied) for her autograph book; but in the letter accompanying the manuscript, he described it as 'the little piece in F sharp minor' that he had improvised the previous





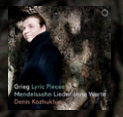
evening, with no mention of any title. In Schumann's review, he comments that this last piece of the group, 'a Venetian barcarolle, softly and tenderly closes the whole. And thus we can once more rejoice in a gift from this noble spirit!'

Schumann later reviewed the Op. 38 set of *Songs without Words*, writing that these pieces, like the earlier ones, stand 'between painting and poetry' – 'zwischen Gemälde und Gedicht' – adding that it would be an easy task to add words and colours to them. He also speculated that of these six pieces, the second and sixth (a vocal duet without words) were probably the ones that Mendelssohn himself preferred, though writing about No. 6, Schumann expressed his slight frustration that 'this rich, thoroughly German conversation is not in words, which would more freely enable it to express itself – but these are really lovers who converse so trustfully, softly and securely.' In general, Mendelssohn's later sets of *Songs without Words* were assembled from short single pieces into collections by the composer (rather than being conceived as groups of pieces) and many of them have the same characteristics as the earlier pieces. Novelties in the Op. 67 set included a solo song that becomes a duet (Op. 67 No. 2) and the brilliant 'Spinning Song' Op. 67 No. 4. These are wonderful examples of Mendelssohn's inventive genius, but the composer himself was diffident about what he had achieved in these short works. Schumann later recalled that when he was looking over the collected *Songs without Words* he said to Mendelssohn: 'That was a good idea of yours', to which Mendelssohn replied, 'Well, at least it was well meant.'

Ethel Smyth declared that 'many a remark of Edvard Grieg – as modest, golden-hearted, natural a creature as ever breathed – had exactly the fresh, fascinating quality of his music'. Grieg's musical ambitions were sometimes as unassuming as his personality. Shortly before his death in 1907, he gave an interview to the Leipzig

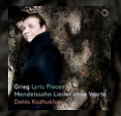
journal *Signale für die musikalische Welt*. He declared that 'artists like Bach and Beethoven erected churches and temples on the heights. I wanted, as Ibsen put it in one of his later dramas, to build dwellings for people in which they might feel comfortable and happy.' Grieg's *Lyric Pieces* – ten collections of short piano pieces composed between 1866 and 1901 – might seem to embody this creative philosophy. Many are affectionate portraits of his Norwegian homeland, but others are more abstract. For example, the Op. 12 set, composed in 1866–7, includes an *Arietta* and a *Waltz* as well as the more overtly "Nordic" *Elves' Dance*. The second set, Op. 38 (1883), again balances pieces with and without a specifically Norwegian inspiration: *Halling* (Op. 38 No. 4) is a Norwegian folk dance, while the *Elegie* Op. 38 No. 6 is a short but deeply felt reflection in which Grieg's musical language is deployed at its most chromatic and expressive. The manuscript of the first of the third set of *Lyric Pieces* Op. 43 is dated 16 April 1886. Grieg himself played the whole Op. 43 set at one of the Saturday Popular Concerts in St James's Hall, London, on 30 March 1889. The report of the event in the magazine *The Queen* described them as 'delightful … most daintily and charmingly written', noting that each of the pieces, apart from the more developed Op. 43 No. 6, consisted of 'a single theme, the character … being indicated by the titles prefixed to them.' Grieg played his pieces 'with exquisite grace and delicacy' and they were much enjoyed by the audience: 'Herr Grieg [was] compelled to return to the platform no fewer than four times to acknowledge the persistent applause.' The *Musical Times* also reviewed this concert, finding the pieces 'pleasing and characteristic' but not of 'any very great value' – a rather typical assessment of the time, when Grieg's larger works tended to attract more attention from critics.

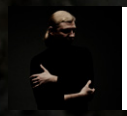
The fourth set was composed in 1888 and the autograph manuscript of the *Elegie* Op. 47 No. 7 is dated 3 April 1888, a tender



piece that explores some unusual harmonies in its central section, before returning to the quiet melancholy of the main theme. Composed in June and July 1891, the fifth set of *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 54, was dedicated to Grieg's friend Julius Röntgen (as was the orchestral *Lyric Suite* derived from these pieces by Grieg himself shortly afterwards). *Trolltog* (*March of the Trolls*, Op. 54 No. 3) is a delightfully impish evocation of these figures from Scandinavian folklore, but this is followed by a radiant *Nocturne* and an intricate *Scherzo* that collectively demonstrate the expressive range of Grieg's piano miniatures. The Op. 62 *Lyric Pieces* were completed in 1895 (the manuscript is dated 17 June 1895) and *The Brooklet* is a piece that not only demonstrates Grieg's uncanny ability to capture a single thought but also something of the more Impressionistic style of the later pieces in the series. The last of Grieg's Op. 65 *Lyric Pieces* is the most famous of all: 'Wedding Day at Troldhaugen'. Intriguingly, the original manuscript in the Bergen Grieg Archive, dated 3 September 1896, has a quite different title: 'Gratulanterne Kommer' ('The Well-wishers are coming'), but by the time the set was announced for publication by Peters in September 1897, Grieg had given the piece its familiar title and added a footnote to explain that Troldhaugen was the name of the composer's villa (built in 1885). Four years earlier, in June 1892, the couple had celebrated their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary with a gathering at the Fossli Hotel near the Vøringsfossen waterfall – some 150km east of Troldhaugen – and happy memories of this occasion inspired Grieg to write the piece in the first place. Nina Grieg subsequently suggested that this joyous march should be named after their home at Troldhaugen.

Nigel Simeone





Acknowledgments

PRODUCTION TEAM
Executive producer **Renaud Loranger**
A&R manager **Kate Rockett**
Recording producer, Balance engineer & editor **Erdo Groot (Polyhymnia International B.V.)**

Photography **Marco Borggreve**
Liner notes **Nigel Simeone**
Design **Zigmunds Lapsa**
Product management **Kasper van Kooten**

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PENTATONE TEAM
Vice President A&R **Renaud Loranger** | Director **Simon M. Eder**
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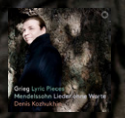
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